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BALANCED TRAY

More than just lunch

Dietitian's corner

Lentils: Tiny Powerhouses for Health & Energy

Lentils are a type of pulse (like chickpeas and beans) that have been eaten for thousands of years across many cultures.

They're a staple in cuisines around the world – from Indian dhal to Middle Eastern soups and Mediterranean salads.

Affordable, versatile, and packed with essential nutrients, lentils are an excellent choice for growing bodies, busy minds, and active lifestyles.

Why Lentils Deserve a Spot on Your Plate

Brain & Energy Support

- Lentils are rich in slow-release carbohydrates, helping to keep energy levels steady throughout the school day.
- They provide iron, which helps carry oxygen around the body. This is especially important during teenage growth spurts and can help reduce feelings of tiredness and low energy.

Protein for Growth

- Lentils provide plant-based protein, supporting muscle growth and repair.
- Ideal for active young people and those involved in sport.

- When combined with foods like rice, bread, or potatoes, lentils help provide a balanced mix of amino acids needed for growth and development.

Fibre for Gut Health

- Most people in the UK don't eat enough fibre – lentils are an easy way to increase intake.
- Fibre supports healthy digestion and helps you feel fuller for longer, which can prevent energy dips and excessive snacking.

Heart Health (Now and Later)

- Eating lentils regularly can help maintain healthy cholesterol levels.
- Building heart-healthy eating habits in teenage years supports long-term health into adulthood.

Good for the Planet

- Lentils use significantly less water than meat to produce.
- They help improve soil health by fixing nitrogen, which supports sustainable farming.
- Lentils have a lower carbon footprint than many animal protein sources, making them a planet-friendly choice.

Easy Ways to Enjoy Lentils

- Mild lentil dhal with rice or flatbread
- Lentil bolognese or chilli
- Hearty lentil and vegetable soup
- Lentil burgers or wraps
- Mix lentils into mince dishes to boost fibre and nutrition

Top tip: Red and yellow lentils cook quickly and have a soft texture, making them a great starting point for anyone new to lentils.

Did You Know?

- Lentils come in many colours, including red, green, brown, black, and yellow
- They don't need soaking like most dried beans, which makes them quick and easy to cook
- Canned lentils are just as nutritious as dried

Key Takeaway

- ✓ Nutritious
- ✓ Sustainable
- ✓ Budget-friendly
- ✓ Easy to cook

Adding lentils to meals even **once or twice a week** can boost health, support steady energy levels, and help protect the planet.

From our kitchen to yours

With Development Chef, Nik Johnston.

Get Ready to Flip!

Since Pancake Day falls right in the middle of half term this year, it's the perfect excuse to get the whole family cooking together.

Whether your household loves the classic lemon and sugar combo or prefers something a little more adventurous, there's plenty to enjoy.

In this edition, we're sharing our favourite sweet and savoury pancake recipes — simple enough for even the youngest helpers to join in. You'll also find allergy friendly swaps for gluten free and dairy-free families, plus two easy fruit compotes using either seasonal produce or frozen berries for a deliciously fuss free topping.

And for those who prefer something savoury, we've included a comforting celeriac and cheese option as well as a creamy chicken carbonara.

Grab your aprons, pick your toppings, and get ready for a flipping fantastic day!



Pancake batter mix - makes 12

Ingredients

- 100g plain flour
- 2 eggs
- 300ml milk
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil for cooking

Allergy tip – The flour & milk can be substituted with gluten-free or dairy-free alternatives

Instructions

- Put all the ingredients in a jug or bowl, then whisk to a smooth batter. This should be similar in consistency to single cream.
- Set aside for 30 mins to rest if you have time, or start cooking straight away.
- Set a medium frying pan or crêpe pan over a medium heat and carefully wipe it with some oiled kitchen paper.

- When hot, cook your pancakes for 1 min on each side until golden, using around half a ladleful of batter per pancake. Keep them warm in a low oven as you make the rest.
- Serve with your chosen sweet or savoury topping.

Top tip – Once cold, you can layer the pancakes between baking parchment, then wrap in cling film and freeze for up to two months.

If you have an egg allergy here's a great alternative recipe:

- 300g/12oz self-raising flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 1 tbsp vanilla extract
- 400ml/14fl oz milk or plant-based milk
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil for cooking

Top Tip

For a smoother, mess free(ish) Pancake Day, start by making your batter and letting it rest for around 30 minutes; this helps create fluffier pancakes and gives you time to prepare your toppings.

While the batter is resting, get all your toppings ready using your chosen recipes. Keep little ones busy with whisking and decorating duties, while adults stay in charge of the hot pans. Once everything is prepared, cook the pancakes last, as they only take a few minutes.



Do you have a dish you'd love to see featured? Let us know, and we'll happily consider including the recipe and expert advice in a future edition! Send your recipe request to ukmarketing@taylorshaw.com



Celeriac and cheese sauce

Grate 100g of celeriac and add to your pancake batter and cook your pancakes as above.

Cheese sauce

Ingredients

- 50g butter
- 50g plain flour
- 500ml milk
- 150g grated cheese
- Seasoning: pinch of salt and pepper

Method

- Melt the butter in a medium saucepan over a medium heat.

Top Tip

If your cheese sauce goes lumpy simply blend it or pass through a fine sieve.

- When melted, stir in the flour with a whisk or wooden spoon.
- Cook for 1-2 minutes, stirring constantly, until the paste is smooth and slightly foamy, but not brown.
- Cooking the roux first will remove the raw flour taste.
- Gradually pour in the cold milk a little at a time, whisking constantly to ensure it is fully incorporated and the sauce remains smooth. Continue adding milk until it is all in the pan.
- Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer over a low-to-medium heat, whisking frequently to prevent lumps and scorching. Continue to cook for about 3-5 minutes, or until the sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.
- Remove the pan from the heat. Add the grated cheese a handful at a time, whisking until each addition has melted before adding more.
- Season to taste with salt and pepper. Taste and add more cheese or seasoning if needed.

Fun Fact

Celeriac is part of the same botanical family as parsley, parsnips, and carrots, and can be roasted, boiled, steamed, mashed, and even grated raw into salads

Fruit Compote

Ingredients

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 500g rhubarb*, chopped into 4-5cm pieces • 100g sugar • 50ml water • 1 orange, zest and juice | <div style="border: 2px solid orange; border-radius: 50%; width: 30px; height: 30px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 0 auto;"> OR </div> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 500g frozen fruit • 50g sugar • Either a vanilla pod or a cinnamon stick |
|--|---|--|

*The rhubarb can easily be swapped for apples and bananas, simply add a tsp of cinnamon or mixed spice to replace the orange

Method

- Place all the ingredients either in a wide saucepan or baking dish
- Cover and simmer or bake until the fruit is soft but not too mushy, 10-15 mins

Savoury Pancakes

Chicken Carbonara

Ingredients

- 300g cooked chicken (leftover roast or poached), shredded or diced
- 2 eggs
- 75g grated Parmesan (plus extra to serve)
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 100g pancetta or streaky bacon, diced
- Black pepper
- Peas or sweetcorn for extra veg

Method

- In a bowl, whisk together the eggs and Parmesan. Season with pepper.
- Cook the pancetta or bacon in a frying pan until crisp.
- Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute.
- Stir in the cooked chicken and warm through.
- Quickly pour in the egg mixture, tossing well so the heat add a splash of water if it needs loosening.
- Pour over your pancakes and finish with extra Parmesan and black pepper.

Congratulations to our Christmas Crafting Competition Winner

In our Christmas edition, we launched a competition inviting families to send us a photo of any handmade gift created by anyone attending one of the schools we cater for.

We are delighted to announce the winner. Congratulations to Emma, a Year 8 student from Pickering!

Here's Emma's wonderful entry:

"This Christmas, I've been crafty and turned some plain white canvas shoes into one of a kind gifts for my friends.

After secretly checking their shoe sizes last month, I decorated each pair with unique designs that feel far more personal than buying something off the shelf.

Every pair becomes a little canvas where I can reflect their personality, inside jokes, or favourite colours.

It's been such a fun, creative process that's let me experiment and make something extra special.

Now they're wrapped and ready to give, the shoes aren't just presents — they're wearable reminders of the care, creativity, and holiday spirit that went into making them."

Congratulations, Emma — your prize is on its way.



Crafting this half-term

How to build a hedgehog home

The Latin word for hedgehogs is *Erinaceus* and our own British hedgehog is scientifically known as *Erinaceus europaeus*.

In Britain it is found almost everywhere but tends to be scarce or absent from wet areas and pine forests.

Hedgehogs are well established in our urban habitat and can, somewhat surprisingly, survive very well in our cities, making extremely good use of cemeteries, railway land, wasteland and both public and private gardens as long as they are joined up with others.

However, sadly hedgehogs are endangered here due to the destruction of their habitats, road traffic and chemicals called pesticides often sprayed on their food.

For this reason, it is important we look out for hedgehogs and make sure their night-time adventures are safe because they can travel up to two miles in one night!



Making a hedgehog home is a wonderful way to support these little visitors, giving them a safe place to sleep or even hibernate.

If building one isn't an option, you can also find ready made hedgehog houses in many pet shops and garden centres.

At Taylor Shaw, we do our best to look after our local environment and make it a great place for everyone by organising littler picks in our local community.

For more information on hedgehogs, other native wildlife, and how you can do your bit, please visit www.wildlifetrusts.org. It's a great resource and the place where we found these incredible hedgehog houses.

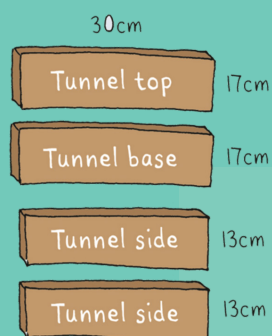
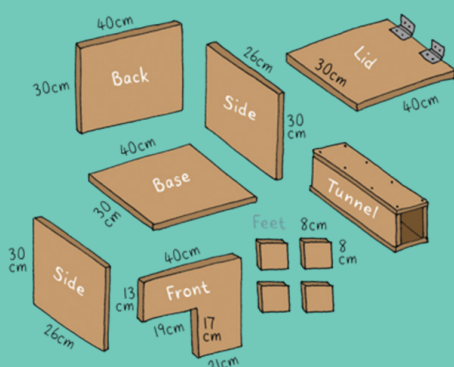
Source: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-hedgehog-home>

What you need:

- Hammer and nails
- 2 metal hinges
- Soil
- Straw or dry leaves
- Polythene sheeting
- 20mm untreated FSC plywood boards (birch is ideal!) cut to the sizes shown
- A quiet, shady spot

Steps:

1. Cut your timber to the dimensions shown. Assemble the tunnel and main chamber separately; attaching the feet and the hinge flap before putting the box together will make things a little easier. Don't be tempted to skip the tunnel – it means that predators won't be able to swipe their paws inside!



The tunnel will be slightly shorter than the height of the opening so that it can be slotted in at an angle, making a ramp. You can also drill a hole that will fit a hosepipe into the back of the box to add some extra ventilation.

2. Pick a shady, quiet spot to put your assembled hedgehog house. Lift the lid off the house and put the dry leaves inside.
3. Cover with polythene sheeting (making sure it's still accessible for cleaning later on), and pack soil and dead leaves around the outside, leaving the entrance and air pipe free of debris.

